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TITLE
THE KINDWILLER RAID
The Rifle Company in a Night Raid

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PREFACE

This is the story of a night raid on the German held town of Kindwiller, France, made by G Company, 409th Infantry Regiment, 103rd Infantry Division. Capt. Roger H. Craddock, of Winnsboro, Texas commanded Company G. I was his artillery forward observer.

Different readers of this monograph will find different things. The men who participated will find here an account of their activities. The casual reader may be interested in the accomplishments of this unit. The officer of little or no combat experience may find in these pages an example which will assist him later, should he be faced with such a mission. It is for the benefit of the latter that this monograph is written.

Except where noted, this volume is written from personal experience. Special thanks are extended to Lt. Col. L. K. Henninghausen, then Battalion Commander of the 2nd Bn., 409th Infantry, and Maj. A. J. Potter, Regimental S2 at the time of this action. Information received from these officers assisted the author materially in the preparation of this work.

INTRODUCTION

When one thinks of a raid one must also think of a withdrawal. Herein lies the most pronounced difference between this type of operation and the normal attack. A raid, therefore, is a "hit and run" tactic with no idea of holding ground.

This is not a discussion of commando type tactics where great distances and combined operations are involved, nor raids of a strategic nature, as the large scale air raids of World War II. Rather, it is a discussion of the type of operation which visualizes the infantryman in his normal role -- on his two feet, pressing forward to his objective and closing with the enemy.

It must be borne in mind that any infantry unit commander may be required to execute this type of operation. Therefore, in this discussion, it is my purpose to give the unit commander, if he is assigned a raiding mission, an idea of what he may expect and what will be expected of him. When assigned such a mission, the commander must tend toward the perfectionist in his reconnaissance, his planning, his orders, and their execution -- for herein lies success or failure. The reader should note that this planning and execution will not differ greatly from the normal type attack. Since holding the objective is not a consideration, he should utilize the minimum force necessary to accomplish the mission. In conjunction he should realize that objectives can be approached and attacked at night, with minimum loss, where no reasonable chance of success is afforded in daylight. Lastly, the success in this type of operation will inspire a sense of pride in a unit which cannot be easily acquired by other means. Failure will have an equally adverse effect.

To spare the reader a "field manual" approach and because most military men are interested in history, I have chosen to discuss this subject by relating an actual combat experience of a rifle company in this type of operation. The reader should bear in mind that this is the story of a night raid made by G Company, 409th Infantry Regiment, 103rd Division.

DISCUSSION

It is felt that a brief description of operations prior to the raid is necessary, so the reader may better understand the situation and circumstances leading up to the actual raid.

On 5 January 1945, the Seventh Army front consisted, in effect, of two salients. One was the German held salient in the Haardt Mountains; the other our own in the Alsace Plain, with its flanks threatened on the west by the enemy in the Haardt Mountains, and on the east by the Gambsheim bridgehead. (1)

The enemy attempted to liquidate the VI Corps salient by exerting relentless pressure against the flanks while simultaneously attacking strongly against the nose. (2)

Desperate fighting in bitter cold weather continued until 20 January against superior forces led by the infamous Heinrich Himmler himself. All efforts to dislodge the stubborn enemy were unavailing. A battalion of the 45th Division was cut off, a battalion of the 79th Division was surrounded, and a tank battalion of the 12th Armored Division was lost. (3)

- (1) See Map A, Appendix
- (2) Seventh Army, "G2 History Seventh Army Operations in Europe", Part Six, 1-31 Jan 45, June 45, p. 2, TIS Library.
- (3) Ibid.

The 103rd Division successfully defended its sector in the nose of the salient. However, with both flanks threatened and in view of an increasing buildup of German strength surrounding the salient, the VI Corps withdrew to the Moder River line on 20 January. (4)

While this withdrawal saved American troop losses, served to maintain the integrity of units and afforded a breathing spell, it was also a source of considerable embarrassment to the enemy. With victory almost in his grasp, he was now forced to follow up and locate the new line -- hampered by obstacles and delaying forces. The establishment of the new line (5) was completed by 21 January, as scheduled, despite the icy conditions of roads which hampered movement.

The anticipated enemy attack of the Moder River line got underway on the night of 24-25 January (6). The enemy succeeded in breaching the line at three points, one of these prongs hitting the 103rd Division sector at Muhlhausen (7). These enemy attacks were successfully repulsed and he never again gained the initiative. Because the forces being used in this effort were "needed as reserves behind future defensive efforts", the Fuehrer commanded on 25 January, according to captured documents, that the attack against Alsace be suspended. (8)

The aftermath of this battle for survival found the 103rd Division front quiet. With frequent rotation of units in the line, life for the 409th Infantry became a long wintery wait for the Seventh Army spring offensive.

- (4) Headquarters 6th Army Group, "Final Report, G3 Section, Headquarters 6th Army Group, World War II", July 45, p. 35, TIS Library; also Mueller, Ralph and Turk, Jerry, "Report After Action, The Story of the 103rd Infantry Division", 1945, p. 66, TIS Library.
- (5) See Map B, Appendix
- (6) Headquarters 7th Army, "Report of Operations, The Seventh United States Army in France and Germany 1944-1945", 1946, Vol. II, p. 618, TIS Library.
- (7) Ibid. p. 618-619. Also Mueller, Ralph and Turk, Jerry, "Report After Action, The Story of the 103rd Infantry Division", 1945, p. 67, TIS Library.
- (8) Headquarters 7th Army "Report of Operations, The Seventh United States Army in France and Germany, 1944-1945", 1946, Vol. II, p. 623.

While on line, the 409th improved its positions and patrolled. While in reserve, behind-the-lines training was conducted in preparation for a second attempt to breach the Siegfried Line.

A news item which appeared in American papers about this time pretty well sums up activities on the division front: "All was quiet on the Seventh Army front today. Patrols were active and there were occasional exchanges of artillery." (9)

The patrols, for the most part, had but one mission -- "to get as many prisoners as possible." (10) The German order of battle had to be known in order to intelligently plan for renewal of the offensive. However, the enemy reacted violently to any patrol probes and his counter-reconnaissance measures, which included extensive mining, proved effective. At first, the patrol problem was strictly an S2 - G2 affair. When the flow of prisoners to the division P. W. enclosure stopped, it immediately became a source of concern to higher commanders. (11)

"RAIDS MAY BE MADE TO CAPTURE PRISONERS; TO CAPTURE OR DESTROY SPECIFIC ENEMY MATERIAL; TO OBTAIN DETAILED INFORMATION OF HOSTILE UNITS, DISPOSITIONS, LOCATIONS, STRENGTH, WORKS, INTENTIONS, OR METHODS OF DEFENSE; TO HARASS THE ENEMY; AND TO INSPIRE CONFIDENCE AND AGGRESSIVENESS IN THE RAIDING TROOPS" (12)

In these words higher commanders found a solution to their problem. Thus, with approval of the division G2 and knowledge of the division commander, the 409th Infantry received permission to send a raiding force behind the lines to secure prisoners. (13)

(9) East, William and Gleason, William F., "The 409th Infantry In World War II", p. 89, Infantry Journal Press, Wash., TIS Library.

(10) Ibid.

(11) Personal Letter from Regimental S2, Maj. A. J. Potter to Author, 14 Sept 52.

(12) FM 7-20, "Infantry Battalion", March 50, p. 262, par. 273, TIS Library.

(13) Personal letter from Regimental S2, Maj. A. J. Potter to Author, 14 Sept. 52.

"WHERE POSSIBLE, THE AREA SELECTED FOR THE RAID IS ONE WHICH IS LIGHTLY DEFENDED ... IN ORDER TO PERMIT RAPID EXECUTION OF THE RAID, THE AREA SHOULD BE AS CLOSE TO FRIENDLY FRONT LINES AS PRACTICABLE, AND THE TERRAIN LEADING TO IT SHOULD HAVE FEW SERIOUS OBSTACLES WITH NO DIFFICULT GROUND TO TRAVERSE." (14)

The town of Kindwiller, which laid approximately one mile forward of the regimental main line of resistance, best met the requirements. Previous attempts to take prisoners from enemy positions closer to the line had been unsuccessful. The positions were well organized and surrounded with anti-personnel mines. It was also felt that a raiding force could get into Kindwiller as the enemy would not expect such an operation there. (15)

"THE SIZE OF THE RAIDING FORCE IS KEPT TO THE MINIMUM WHICH REASONABLY CAN BE EXPECTED TO ACCOMPLISH THE MISSION." (16)

S2 estimates placed the enemy strength in Kindwiller at one reinforced platoon. Actually the town was defended by a reinforced company. This serves as an indication of just how "fuzzy" the S2 picture was at the time. Previous patrols of varying size had been unsuccessful in entering the town. An attempt on 4 February by a company had met with no success due to lack of surprise. (17)

(14) FM 7-20 "Infantry Battalion" March 50, p. 265, par. 278, TIS Library.

(15) Personal letter from Bn. Cmdr. 2nd Bn 409th Inf., Lt. Col. L. K. Henninghausen, to Author, 17 Sept. 52.

(16) FM 7-20, "Infantry Battalion", March 50, p. 265, par. 279.

(17) East, William and Gleason, William F., "The 409th Infantry In World War II", p. 93, Infantry Journal Press, Wash., TIS Library.

With these facts to go on, the decision was made by the regimental commander to use a company size unit. G Company was selected for the job. (It might be added here that G Company was picked due to its past performance. The commander was courageous and dependable, and through his personal example these qualities were instilled in his men. The company had never failed to accomplish an assigned mission. (18))

The decision to use a company size unit proved to be right. In view of the actual size of the enemy force encountered, it is felt that a smaller unit could not have accomplished the mission. It is also felt that a unit of larger size would have lost the element of surprise. The use of G Company, since the 2nd Bn was in reserve at this time, was further justified as it is desirable to use fresh troops, or reserves of troops in contact, for night operations. (19)

"THE BATTALION COMMANDER MAY REQUEST THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMPANY COMMANDER FOR THE ROUTES OF ADVANCE AND WITHDRAWAL AND FOR PLANNING THE FIRE SUPPORT ... HE MAY PRESCRIBE OTHER DETAILS OR LEAVE THEM TO THE COMPANY COMMANDER'S JUDGMENT." (20)

On 5 February, upon notification of his mission, the company commander met with the battalion commander and artillery liaison office to make his tentative plan of attack. (It should be noted here that planning and reconnaissance for a night raid does not differ greatly from that for the normal night attack.) The terrain in the vicinity of the objective was not unfamiliar, as the battalion had organized the main line of resistance in that sector and had occupied the positions for some time. Therefore, certain decisions could be made at this initial conference.

(18) Personal letter from Regimental S2, Maj. A. J. Potter, to Author, 14 Sept 52.

(19) FM 100-5, Aug 49, p. 195, par. 806.

(20) FM 7-10, Oct 49, p. 251, par. 249.

concealment
It was decided that since the ground from the outpost line to the objective was open, consisting of plowed fields and a few scattered vineyards and offering no concealment and little cover, the attack would be executed during the hours of darkness. Due to the distance from the main line of resistance to the objective, the company would depend upon darkness and the element of surprise to gain entry into the town. Therefore, no preparation would be fired. Searchlights available to the regiment would illuminate the attack.

With these decisions made and with the assurance that he and his staff would render any assistance desired, the battalion commander gave the company commander a free hand in his planning.

The company commander immediately requested an aerial photo of the town, and the use of an artillery liaison plane to make an aerial reconnaissance. These requests were received favorably and both were granted.

"THE PLANNING AND COORDINATION OF A RAID IS AS DETAILED AND COMPLETE AS POSSIBLE. A SIMPLE PLAN, THOROUGHLY UNDERSTOOD BY ALL PARTICIPATING TROOPS, AND THROUGH RECONNAISSANCE ARE ESSENTIAL." (21)

On 6 February, the company commander, accompanied by his platoon leaders, made his reconnaissance. During this reconnaissance they proceeded as far forward as possible -- to the outposts along the Moder River. They talked to the commanders on line and moved from vantage point to vantage point along the front so as to cover every possible route of approach to the objective. Following this, the company commander flew over the town and completed his reconnaissance. It is important here to note that the company commander, fully realizing the importance of careful reconnaissance, devoted an entire day to this task.

(21) FM 7-20, "Infantry Battalion", Oct 49, p. 265, par. 277.

Returning to battalion headquarters that evening, the company commander finalized his plan with the battalion commander and his artillery forward observer, who was to accompany him on the raid. His plan was as follows: (22)

PLAN OF ATTACK

The company would cross the line of departure, the outpost at la Walck, in column of platoons; proceed west generally along the north bank of the Moder River and across the draw, which ran up to the town of Kindwiller. Once across the draw, the company would change direction to the north, with the three rifle platoons deployed in a skirmish line and the weapons platoon following to give flank protection. In the latter formation, the company would advance toward the town on a predetermined compass reading until fired upon. When fired on, the entire skirmish line was to return the fire and continue to advance at a walk until the buildings were reached. At this time, the line would close in on the center platoon and enter the town through a gap in the buildings which had been discovered during reconnaissance and confirmed by the aerial photo. All three rifle platoons were to enter the town with the weapons platoon remaining at the point of entry to keep the route open for withdrawal and to collect prisoners captured by the assault platoons. One squad of the center platoon, equipped with a 2.36" rocket launcher, would block the main road from the east; while the remainder of the assault wave would search out the buildings in the west portion of town.

ARTILLERY FIRE PLAN AND ILLUMINATION

Since the attack depended entirely upon surprise for success, the planned artillery fires were limited to protective fires only. With the infantry concentrating its effort on the west portion of the town, artillery fire was required to isolate the east end, and to cover the withdrawal.

(22) See Map C, Appendix

To accomplish these missions, five, well placed concentrations were pinpointed by the company commander, assisted by his forward observer. Concentrations one and two were planned to accomplish the isolation mission, with one battery, from the direct support artillery battalion firing maximum rate, on each concentration. Concentrations one through four were to be fired to cover the withdrawal. Concentration five would be fired by the regimental cannon company to assist in the withdrawal. All fires to be fired on call.

Illumination would be furnished by the searchlight unit attached to the regiment. The town was to be illuminated when the raiding force was discovered, and darkened during the withdrawal. The command to "turn on the moon" and "turn off the moon" would be given by the company commander.

PLAN FOR WITHDRAWAL

As soon as prisoners were taken and returned to the weapons platoon, the signal to withdraw (a green star parachute flare) would be given by the company commander. When the flare was fired, the company was to withdraw immediately over the same route used for the approach. Artillery fires would continue on concentrations one and two, hold fire on concentrations three and four for five minutes, and then, joined by the cannon company, to completely inundate the town with fire.

PLAN FOR COMMUNICATIONS

Communications between platoons would be by SCR536 radio and messenger. The artillery forward observer, assisted by the company communication sergeant, would lay a line of W-130 assault wire from the outpost forward as the company advanced. This line would be connected to a EE-8 telephone at the outpost monitored by the battalion S2. The forward observer from the cannon company was also to remain at the outpost with direct wire communication to his company. A direct line would be laid from the EE-8 telephone at the outpost to the front line battalion switchboard.

With the switchboard plugged through as for a conference, and the lines held open, any command given by the company commander could be heard simultaneously by the outpost, the artillery liaison officer at the 2nd battalion CP and the regimental S3 at the regimental CP. The artillery liaison officer, with another phone in his hand, would pass artillery fire commands on to the fire direction center. The regimental S3, in the same manner, could pass on requests direct to the searchlight unit. In this way, by maintaining strict discipline, maximum use could be made of existing communication nets by laying one line from the outpost to the front line battalion switchboard. This line would be paralleled to insure continuous service.

In addition, an SCR300 radio would be carried by the company, but to insure silence would not be turned on. An SCR300 radio at the outpost would be turned on and monitored. This would provide an alternate means of communication, using the battalion S2 to relay, if the line from the outpost to the company went out.

In the interest of keeping the force at a minimum, the artillery SCR610 radio was not to be carried. This would have provided a third means of communication but would have required a two-man carry.

EQUIPMENT

The three platoons would carry full automatic weapons, the weapons platoon would carry M-1 rifles only. One 2.36" rocket launcher would be carried by the lead platoon for anti-tank protection in town. Each man would carry at least two offensive-type hand grenades.

A three-inch white ball would be painted on the back of each helmet to serve as a distinctive marking. All personal effects would be left behind; the only identification would be dog tags.

TIME OF ATTACK

The company would pass through the outpost at 0100 hours, planning to hit the town at 0300 hours. The company commander felt that 0300 would be the best time, as he could take advantage of the early morning ground fog which hung in the area at this time of year. Also, it was the latest he could hit the town and reasonably expect to rally his company at the outpost before daylight.

The battalion commander voiced approval, and his staff immediately began implementation of the plan. Automatic weapons were borrowed from the other companies in the battalion and a tank battalion which was attached to the division. These weapons consisted of Cal. .45, M3 submachine guns, Thompson submachine guns, and Browning automatic rifles. (It is worth noting here that the present issue M2 carbine could be substituted for the submachine guns in this type of operation.-- to gain increased fire power at close range -- this increase being highly desirable.)

The battalion communications office accomplished the necessary coordination of communications, according to the approved plan, and additional wire was issued to the company. The artillery forward observer coordinated the artillery fire plan with the fire direction center. The regimental S3 effected the necessary coordination for illumination.

At 1400 hours on 7 February, the company commander assembled the four platoon leaders, company executive officer, artillery forward observer, and communication sergeant at the company command post. With the aid of a blackboard and the aerial photo of the town, the commander issued his order in every detail, designating responsibility of each unit for a portion of the objective. It is not necessary here to go into the details of the order as it followed the plan as already outlined. He emphasized the following points: hold fire until fired on; return the initial burst of enemy fire and continue to advance at a walk; freeze in place if illumination flares are fired by the enemy. / All men would be checked for colds and loose equipment, and all

personal effects and identification, other than dog tags and distinctive marking, would be left behind. Platoon leaders would tell their men "that they were in for a fight", but, by observing all orders, the odds for success would be improved.

The company was at 80% strength (23), approximately 190 men. Replacements had arrived during the day but the decision was made to leave them behind on this raid.

Platoon leaders returned to their units and issued the platoon orders. Automatic weapons, ammunition and grenades were issued. A hot meal was fed, and the remaining time was spent in checking weapons and getting as much rest as possible.

At approximately 2200 hours, the company was formed. Last minute checks were made and the men loaded on $2\frac{1}{2}$ ton trucks and headed for the front. At the de-trucking point, the company was met by the regimental commander who accompanied them to the outpost. His presence seemed to give an added importance to the operation.

The night was inky black, and the temperature was a little high, about 40 degrees, for this time of year. A general thawing condition was taking place, leaving the terrain damp and muddy. A light ground fog hung in the area. Except for the normal harassing fires, the area was quiet.

The company commander checked in at the outpost for a last minute briefing on the situation. Artillery and searchlight units were alerted, and the company moved through the outpost and down the river at 0100 hours. (24)

- (23) Personal letter, 2nd Bn. Cmdr., 409th Inf., Lt. Col. L. K. Henningshausen, to Author, 17 Sept. 52.
- (24) East, William and Gleason, William F., "The 409th Infantry In World War II", p. 93, Infantry Journal Press, Wash., TIS Library.

Everything was going according to plan.

Approximately 200 yards from the outpost, a four-man/^{enemy}patrol literally bumped into the center of the leading platoon. Taken completely by surprise, and seeing themselves outnumbered, the patrol surrendered and was escorted to the outpost. Intercepting this patrol was definitely a piece of luck. It was apparent that the men realized the necessity for silence, which had been impressed upon them in the order.

The company continued to advance. Progress was slow, as the men tried to keep their place in line and maintain direction forward. At 0225 (25) direction became doubtful. The company commander, to reassure himself on direction, requested one round of artillery on concentrations one and four to mark the ends of the town. Communications were working and the rounds were on the way with practically no delay. (26) From the two bursts, visible through the fog, it was determined that direction was correct, and that the town lay some 300 yards ahead. A round of artillery observed on a known point is a rapid means of orientation during night operations -- a fact that is well to bear in mind.

At this point, with everyone reassured by the success enjoyed so far, the tempo of the attack was stepped up. Approximately 150 yards from town, the skirmish line rolled in on the center platoon; the remaining distance was covered in column of platoons. As the lead platoon entered the town, the enemy line opened up with heavy small arms fire. The fire was too late, however, and the assault platoons were through the break and into town before serious damage could be done to them.

- (25) East, William and Gleason, William F., "The 409th Infantry in World War II", p. 95, Infantry Journal Press, Wash., TIS Library.
- (26) East, William and Gleason, William F., "The 409th Infantry in World War II" state that there was a sixteen minute delay between these rounds; this is not correct, the rounds were fired in rapid succession.

Artificial moonlight was called for and turned on at once, as though the company commander had thrown a switch as he gave the order. Artillery fire immediately followed the illumination, isolating the east (27) end of town. The effect of good planning could now be seen.

Fire from enemy mortars and a high velocity gun at the east end of town began to take its toll from the support platoon deployed at the gap. The muzzle flashes from these weapons were picked up by observers on the main line of resistance, however, and quickly silenced by the regimental cannon company. (28)

Fourteen minutes after the assault wave had entered town, eleven prisoners (29) were returned to the weapons platoon. The company commander immediately gave the signal to withdraw. Word was given the artillery to continue fire on the east end of town and, in five minutes, to lay down the planned fires for the withdrawal. Men moved to the rear in small groups, carrying the wounded. Artillery and cannon fire came in on schedule and served its purpose well. The enemy made no attempt to follow up and only a few scattered shots were fired in pursuit. Litter teams started forward from the outpost to claim the wounded, who were given emergency treatment at the outpost and evacuated to the rear on jeep ambulances.

- (27) East, William and Gleason, William F., "The 409th Infantry in World War II" state that the infantry probed the buildings to the east of town. This is incorrect as artillery fires isolated this area.
- (28) Statement from cannon FO to author. I remember at the time that the fire stopped rather suddenly, but decided that the weapons were searching out the area firing blindly.
- (29) Two of these prisoners had to be disposed of when they began shouting during the withdrawal, for fear of their disclosing the route.

What were the results? Well, not too gratifying at first glance: 9 prisoners were taken (not counting the patrol); unknown number of automatic weapons were silenced; and an unknown number of the enemy were killed or wounded. Casualties sustained by G Company: 1 killed, 6 missing, 18 wounded, including two officers. Of the wounded, four were returned to duty immediately (30). Strangely enough, the majority of these casualties were sustained by the weapons platoon.

It is not felt that these figures give the true picture. The mission was to capture prisoners; this was accomplished. More could probably have been taken, but one cannot afford to overstay his welcome in this type of operation. It is most desirable to accomplish the mission and withdraw while the enemy is still off-balance and before he can reinforce; therefore, the raiding force cannot tarry on the objective, but must "hit and run."

The planning and execution of the operation could hardly be improved upon. Success depended on surprise, and this was certainly accomplished.

Although the number of enemy dead and wounded could not be determined, the heavy volume of fire encountered upon entering town as compared to the few sporadic rounds fired in pursuit of the company, should speak for itself.

As I stated in my introduction, this type of operation instilled a sense of pride in the participating troops. The men of G Company were proud of the fact that they had succeeded where other units had failed. The reluctance to remove the distinctive markings from their helmets was another sign of the unit spirit which the men felt. Throughout the area for many days following the action, the talk was mainly of the success the company had enjoyed. To the man, the vote was for G Company, as the best damn company in the army.

(30) East, William and Gleason, William F., "The 409th Infantry in World War II", p. 95, Infantry Journal Press, Wash. TIS Library.

CONCLUSIONS

1. There is no substitute for a thorough reconnaissance and a detailed plan in this type of operation.
2. Planning and execution of a raid does not differ greatly from the normal attack; major difference being a withdrawal plan.
3. Raids are within the capability of regular infantry units; special raider companies are not essential.
4. Modification of table of organization equipment is necessary to provide increased fire power at short ranges, and to reduce weight.
5. Raiding force should be kept to the minimum necessary to accomplish the mission.
6. Objectives can be approached and attacked at night with minimum loss, where no reasonable chance of success is afforded in daylight.
7. Success in this type of operation will inspire a sense of pride in a unit, which cannot easily be obtained otherwise.

APPENDIX

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